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ABSTRACT

The typical woman officer from the nation's largest industrial, banking, retail and utility companies is married, at least 50 years of age, has had some college, was born into a family of low or lower middle class income, and has a work salary of less than $30,000. While the number of women officers in leading business organizations is small, the total has been growing impressively. The majority of the survey participants remain long-service employees who have been promoted from clerical ranks into officer roles. The proportion of women officers whose education, career history, and compensation level bears similarity to senior level males in the work place is, however, still very small. (Author/PJC)

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PROFILE OF A WOMAN OFFICER

Findings of a study of executives in America's 1300 largest companies.

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Management Consulting-Executive Selection

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Heidrick and Struggles provides access to leading executive markets here and abroad through its offices in 14 major business centers. The 77 seasoned, skilled, and sensitive men and women of the firm's professional staff have had extensive management experience prior to entering consulting. These search consultants welcome the challenge of developing optimum solutions to client problems. The staff is supported by the search industry's most extensive research and planning function, the product of 25 years of intelligence gathering on industries, companies within industries, and both sources and prospects within companies.

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METHODOLOGY

This is the second annual study by Heidrick and Struggles of women in key positions in America's leading business organizations. All of the participants hold corporate titles at the nation's 1,000 largest industrials and 50 largest banking, diversified financial, insurance, retailing, transportation, and utility companies. No individuals serving in officer positions at subsidiary, division, or unit levels are included.

To encourage response the mailed questionnaire did not require identification. Two hundred and fifty-five of the 416 officers replied; of these, 235 or 56 percent of the total responded in time to be included in the results. This compares with a usable response of 148 or 46 percent from last year's 325 officers.

As was true in 1977, the make-up of respondents does not vary significantly from all women officers identified in terms of those factors which are known: title, location, and type of employer.

The respondents have been divided by economic background, age, education, marital status, and degree of support for major women's issues to learn the impact of these considerations on their responses to survey questions. Where appropriate, results for this year have been compared with those of last year as well as with recent studies of senior-level male executives.

Heidrick and Struggles is grateful to the women who took time from their busy schedules to make possible the findings which follow.

THE TYPICAL OFFICER

This year's typical woman officer is married, at least 50 years of age, has had some college work, was born into a family of low or lower middle income, and has compensation of less than $30,000 from her non-industrial employment. In these respects she does not differ from her 1977 counterpart.

However, her ranks are increasing. While only 325 women officers were identified in 1977, there are now 416 holding such titles at the nation's 1,300 largest business organizations. This increase of 28 percent is particularly significant since the proportion of women officers at all levels has remained relatively constant; and titles not yet widely held, such as treasurer, are being assumed.

TITLE

Slightly fewer than one in four of the women officers hold the title of vice president or higher. The majority, 55.5 percent, remain at the corporate secretary or assistant secretary rank. Assistant vice presidents constitute 7.5 percent, assistant treasurers 7.2 percent, and a variety of other titles account for the remaining 6 percent.

DIRECTORSHIPS

Only three out of every 100 officers are directors of their own companies, and just eight out of 100 hold outside board posts at one or more companies. While the proportion of inside directors has not increased from last year, the representation of outside directors among the women officers has advanced by one percentage point.

TYPE OF EMPLOYER

Forty-two percent of the participants are empolyed by non-industrial companies, while 58 percent of the women are associated with industrials. Since 1,000 industrials and just 300 non-industrials are included in the study, the incidence of women officers among non-industrials is much greater. One woman is found among each 1.4 non-industrials, compared with every 4.1 industrials.

BASE

Thirty-eight percent of the women are based in the East, 30.5 percent in the Midwest, 15 percent in the South and Southwest, and 16.5 percent in the West. Comparing these totals with the locations of all companies included in the study demonstrates that organizations in the West have assumed the lead in naming women officers, although the East is also overrepresented. The Midwest and South-Southwest lag slightly.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYERS

As was true in last year's study, the typical woman officer has had three different full-time employers over the course of her career. Seventeen percent have been associated with only one company, while one out of four women has had five or more employers. The inter-organizational mobility of the women is analogous to that of men holding senior executive positions.

CAREER CONTINUITY

Eighty-eight percent of the women officers, whether married or unmarried, have been employed continuously throughout their careers. Half of the total respondents are married women who have combined work with family responsibilities on a continuing basis. Only 12 percent reported interrupting their work histories for family and homemaking obligations.

Those women who are younger, college graduates, from more prosperous origins or now most highly compensated are those displaying the greatest career continuity.

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TENURE

One in five of the women officers has been associated with her present employer for 26 or more years, while another fifth of the respondents has five years of service or less.

While the largest proportion of the married officers has a decade or less of service, the never-married group is much more heavily represented in the long-service segment. Indeed, 34 percent of the always-single women report more than a quarter century of association with their present employer.

INITIAL TITLE

Two thirds of today's women officers began their association with their present employer in a clerical post. Only 22 percent joined in a professional capacity, and just one in ten was an officer at the outset.

Indicative of the changing role of women in the work force, 84 percent of the women 50 years of age or older began their present affiliation as clericals; however, this is true of just 65 percent of these in the 40-49 age bracket, and a minority (46 percent) of the under-40 group.

SEX OF PREDECESSOR

Only 15 percent of the women officers were preceded in their current jobs by other women. Fifty-six percent followed males, and 30 percent report that the job they are holding is a new one. The women with male predecessors are most often found in the $40,000-or-more compensation range, while those in new jobs or following females are typically in the less-than-$20,000 bracket.

While a minority of women lacking college degrees assume "male" jobs, 64 percent of the college educated do so.

CASH COMPENSATION

Cash compensation (base and bonus) of women participating in the survey ranged from less than $10,000 to more than $100,000. A majority make less than $30,000, while one in five makes less than $20,000. Fewer than a third make $40,000 or more.

The typical vice president or treasurer earns at least $40,000, while corporate secretaries, assistant vice presidents, assistant secretaries, and assistant treasurers usually fall in the $20,000-$39,999 range.

PERQUISITES

As was true a year ago, not a single one of a dozen perquisites is held by a majority of the women officers, although the same perks are widely held by males.

While the level of office occupied may account for some of this difference, only three perks—stock options, medical examinations, and extra life insurance—are held by a preponderance even of those women making $40,000 or more.

However, just 14 percent of the women officers report they receive none of the perks, a decline from the more than 20 percent claiming to be without any in 1977.

SOURCE OF PRESENT POSITION

Nine out of ten of today's women officers were promoted to their present rank by their current employer. The remaining 10 percent obtained their positions by direct contact, executive recruiter, newspaper ad, or other means.

In contrast, males at officer rank make interorganizational changes almost exclusively by means of direct contact or executive recruiters.

CONSIDERATIONS IN ACCEPTING PRESENT POST

Challenge was by far the most significant factor influencing survey participants to accept their present posts. Scope of responsibility ranked second, followed by opportunity for upward mobility and compensation package.

Relatively unimportant considerations for the women were title, level of reporting relationship, geography, and attitude of management toward women executives.

Interestingly, the considerations most important to the women approximate those named by male officers in a recent study by Hedrick and Struggles. The males named, in order, scope of responsibility, challenge, compensation, and level of reporting relationship. Prospects for upward mobility were far less important to the men, who probably assume that performance will be rewarded with consideration for a bigger job.

HOURS DEVOTED TO WORK

The majority of women officers spend between 41 and 50 hours on company business in a typical seven-day period. However, in keeping with their male counterparts, the more highly compensated women devote more time to business. Women at the less than $20,000 level average 42 hours, those at $20,000-$39,999 typically spend 47 hours, while the $40,000-or-more group spends 53 hours.

Surprisingly, married women average more time on the job—49 hours—than the never-married, who spend 46. As would be expected, the longer-working are younger, more oriented to women's issues, and more highly educated.

HOURS DEVOTED TO COMMUNITY SERVICE

As was true last year, nearly half of the women officers devote no time to community service affairs such as civic and charitable organizations. Those who do participate average just under two hours weekly, and only 16 percent average four or more hours.

Those more involved in community affairs are the more highly educated or women from more prosperous backgrounds. The participation of those earning $40,000 or more is far greater than for those making less than $20,000, even though the higher-earning women typically devote more hours to business.

MENTOR RELATIONSHIP

Fifty-three percent of the women officers report having had a mentor/protege relationship during their careers with a person or persons who took a personal interest in them and who guided or sponsored them. In contrast, 64 percent of the male officers in another recent Heidrick and Struggles study reported having mentors.

The difference may be accounted for in two ways: first, women may not have been as aware of the importance of utilizing a mentor, and second, prospective mentors, almost invariably male, may have been more reluctant to sponsor a woman.

While 118 of the women officers have had one to five male mentors, only 15 report having had a female sponsor. Apparently, having a mentor pays off: 63 percent of the women making $40,000 or more have had mentors, while just 53 percent of those in the $20,000 to $39,999 class and only 34 percent of the women in the less-than-$20,000 group have enjoyed sponsorship.

Typically, women utilizing mentors have never married, are younger, college graduates, supportive of women's issues, or from an advantaged background.

Not a single woman officer felt her mentor(s) had had extraordinary influence on her career. The largest proportion (62 percent) felt the mentor had had little influence, while 18 percent claimed average influence; and 15 percent said the mentor had had no impact on the course of her work life.

PROTEGE RELATIONSHIP

About four out of ten women officers say they have had proteges whom they have sponsored. However, the proteges are far more likely to be other women than to be men.

Those most frequently serving as mentors are the highest-paid women, who are supportive of women's issues, under 50 years of age, with at least one degree or from an upper middle class or wealthy background.

BIRTHPLACE

The largest group of women officers was born in the Midwest, as was true last year. Thirty-nine percent are from America's heartland, while 29 percent come from the East, 18 percent call the South and Southwest home, and nine percent are Western natives. Ten of the participants are foreign-born.

Women officers native to the East are more highly compensated, more likely to have never married, to be older, or to be more highly educated than their fellow officers from other parts of the country.

AGE

More than a quarter of the women officers are 55 or older, while 28 percent are under 40. The majority of the younger women have college degrees, while the preponderance of the older group does not. This same correlation between youth and degree of education is found among male executives.

The majority in all age brackets, with the single exception of the over-55 women, are married. In the oldest segment most of the women are widowed, divorced, or separated.

Women in their mid-forties and older more frequently come from a low or lower middle class background; the majority of those 44 or younger report an upper middle class or wealthy upbringing. This may be a consequence of both the rising American standard of living and a growing propensity of women to work for self-actualization, rather than simply economic necessity.

ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

While the majority of participants come from lower middle class backgrounds, those earning the most are as likely to have come from upper middle class origins.

Women from wealthier circumstances are more prone to support women's issues and to have earned college degrees.

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF PARENTS

Fathers of more than six of every ten of today's women officers did not attend college. Twenty-four percent earned at least one degree, and 11 percent have more than one.

An unusually high proportion (21 percent) of men whose daughters earn $40,000 or more have graduate degrees.

As was true last year, the educational level of participants' mothers lags far behind that of the fathers. Only 13 percent were granted college diplomas.

OCCUPATION OF PARENTS

Three of ten participants report their fathers held blue collar jobs at the time the women entered the labor force full time. Another 20 percent had white collar fathers, while 16 percent reported executive fathers and 12 percent professionals. Another 12 percent noted their fathers were not in the home when the women began their careers. Women now earning $40,000 or more are far more likely to have had fathers employed as executives or professionals.

Eighty-two percent of the mothers of women officers were employed outside the home either before marriage, after marriage, or both before and after marriage.

Women who are earning $40,000 or more, those who are younger, more highly educated, or more supportive of women's issues are most frequently the daughters of working women.

Nearly half of the women officers who had a working mother indicated her occupation as white collar. One in five reported a professional mother, usually a teacher or nurse. Only two individuals had executive mothers, while 31 percent were the offspring of blue collar women.

EDUCATION

Eighteen percent of the women officers hold only high school diplomas, while 38 percent attended college but did not graduate. Forty-five percent of the participants have at least one degree, with 17 percent claiming a master's and 3 percent a doctorate.

Sixty percent of the officers with a master's degree are earning $40,000 or more, compared with 44 percent of the baccalaureate holders and 18 percent of those who only attended college. One high school graduate is at the $40,000-or-more mark.

Seventeen participants report an MBA, 22 a JD; two hold both an MBA and JD, and ten others hold other advanced degrees. All holders of the MBA and/or JD degree earn at least $20,000 annually.

CAMPUS ACHIEVEMENT

The largest group of those officers attending or graduating from college with one or more degrees reported a grade average of A–. A majority of the participants maintained an A or A– average, as was true of last year's officers. Once again, A students constitute the largest portion of those earning $40,000 or more.

Interestingly, the majority of the A, A —, and B + students claimed a low or lower middle class origin, while the bulk of those at the B, or B — and lower designations were from more privileged backgrounds.

The largest segment of the officers report average involvement in extracurricular activities while in college. However, as was the case in 1977, yesterday's "big women on campus" are today's biggest earners.

Twice as many women from modest circumstances reported below average participation in extracurriculars as did their more privileged peers, possibly because they needed to spend more outside-the-classroom time earning money for their education.

TIMING OF FIRST WORK FOR PAY

Last year's officers typically began working outside the home at age 16; the current crop got an even earlier start, with three out of ten earning money before age 16.

Those who joined the labor force at the youngest age are from more modest circumstances, are younger than their fellow officers, have a more extensive education, and are more supportive of women's issues.

MARITAL STATUS

Two thirds of the women officers are married or have been married in the past. Those most likely to have wed are more highly compensated, more supportive of women's issues, or less highly educated.

Usually, the woman officer's first marriage took place while she was in her twenties. Those now in the top earnings bracket have a disproportionate representation in the marriage-after-20 group; lower paid peers were frequently married in their teens.

Thirteen percent of the women married after age 29, and five respondents delayed marriage until their forties or fifties. Individuals supportive of women's issues, those who are better educated and women from more privileged backgrounds were married later than their counterparts.

About a third of the women who have married are now widowed, divorced, or separated. The proportion of divorcees is highest among the most highly paid women.

HUSBAND'S OCCUPATION

While the fathers of women officers were most often blue collar workers, husbands of the women are typically executives (31 percent) or professionals (22 percent). Only 15 percent are blue collar workers.

Those participants with spouses in high status occupations are most likely to be in the top earnings group, are more supportive of women's issues, under 50 years of age, more highly educated, and from more prosperous origins.

MOTHERHOOD

A substantially larger percentage of current women officers are mothers than was true in 1977. Now 57 percent report having children, compared with 31 percent then.

The mothers as a group are lower paid, less favorably disposed toward women's issues, older, less well educated, and from more modest origins.

A majority of the mothers have no child younger than 20; 84 percent indicated no child younger than 13.

However, 12 percent of the parent-officers do have preschool youngsters.

TIMING OF CAREER DECISION

This year's group of officers most frequently did not decide upon a career in business until their first jobs, later than the high school decision point of 1977 officers. However, 43 percent of the current crop had set their course before reaching college age.

Those now married or who have been married settled on a career earlier than the never-marrieds, who usually did not decide on their career course until after full-time employment.

Not unexpectedly, those who lack college degrees made their career decisions earlier than those who are graduates with one or more degrees. The less advantaged also set their career course at an earlier point than did their more privileged peers.

CAREER PLANNING

An even greater proportion of this year's officer group confesses to not following a career plan than was true in 1977. Then 46 percent said they endeavored to follow a plan, while now only 40 percent say so.

Those with career plans are by and large younger, more highly educated and more supportive of women's issues than are their counterparts without such guides.

THINKING REGARDING CAREER FUTURE

As was true last year, the largest proportion of women officers hope to advance to a higher position in their present organization, should that opportunity arise. Only 31 percent would move to another organization if blocked from advancement, while one in four anticipates staying in her present position for the remainder of her career.

The most highly compensated women, those most frequently supportive of women's issues, women under 40, those with degrees, and those from a more privileged background are more prone to an inter-organizational change to accelerate career progress.

Interestingly, the married are more frequently ready to move to another organization than are the never-married. However, both groups see themselves as far less mobile than do the widowed, divorced, and separated.

Only 44 percent of the women officers term themselves eager or willing to move geographically; 45 percent classify themselves as reluctant, and 11 percent declare that a move to a new location is impossible.

While the number of married women declaring they can't move (20 percent) is far greater than among those formerly married or never wed, a third of the wives say they are eager or willing to move, with the remainder simply reluctant. Significantly, the proportion of wives unable to move has dropped five percentage points since the last survey.

The greatest barrier to geographic movement remains age, with 15 percent of the 50-and-over age group saying they won't consider such a change.

The more highly educated and those from a more prosperous upbringing are more accepting of relocation than are their fellow officers.

SPOUSE'S AND CHILDREN'S INFLUENCE ON CAREER DECISIONS

More than four of every ten women officers with a spouse and/or children report that these family members exert just "average" influence on their career decisions. One in five reports "substantial" influence, while one in four reports "slight" influence.

Husbands apparently exert more influence than children, since married women typically report an average influence by family members while those who are widowed, divorced, or separated say family thinking has only slight impact.

As might be expected, those more supportive of women's issues are much more likely to indicate that family exerts only a slight influence on their career decisions.

SATISFACTION WITH CAREER PROGRESS

Overall, the women officers indicate a "high" degree of satisfaction with their career progress, although three of every ten give a "very high" rating. Only 4 percent cite a "low" degree of satisfaction, and not a single participant names "very low."

By and large, the women are less satisfied with their careers than a group of senior level male executives studied recently by Heidrick and Struggles.

The women officers' degree of satisfaction correlates closely with level of compensation; 45 percent of those earning $40,000 or more fall within the "very high" range. Indeed, 92 percent of these high earners derive an above average degree of satisfaction.

Those who have never married have the largest proportion in the "very high" degree of satisfaction group, followed by those not now married, and finally by those currently married. The greater satisfaction of the never-married may result from lower expectations rather than the freedom to pursue their careers to the fullest.

Women supportive of women's issues are generally less satisfied with their career progress than are those not as feminist in their orientation. And, reflecting the developing opportunities for women, those not yet 40 are far more satisfied with their careers than are those who have passed the four-decade mark.

PLEASURE DERIVED FROM WORK

Nearly three out of four women officers stipulate that work and pleasure are one, or that work affords above average pleasure.

Those unwilling to distinguish between labor and leisure are more highly compensated, more highly educated, from a more prosperous background, and widowed, divorced, or separated.

While many participants may be working out of economic necessity, only 5 percent of the group say that work affords below-average pleasure or that labor and leisure are separate and distinct. Nonetheless, as a group, the women find work less pleasurable than did a group of male officers surveyed by Heidrick and Struggles.

FACTOR CONTRIBUTING MOST TO SUCCESS

"Hard work" again proved most prevalent as the reason given by participants for their career success. As was true in 1977, "ability" ranked second in the minds of respondents.

"Luck," which was cited by one in ten during last year's study, was named by only 2 percent this year. The sharp drop-off may be evidence of a rising feeling of self-worth among women in the work place.

While "hard work" stood in premier position among participants at all income levels, all marital conditions, all ages, backgrounds and educations, "ability" was given higher standing by college graduates and those over 50 than by others.

FACTOR IMPEDING PROGRESS THE MOST

"Discrimination against women" is cited by 49 percent of the officers as the factor impeding their progress the most. "Lack of education," in second rank, was named by only 23 percent.

"Discrimination" was named most often by women of every compensation level and every marital status, regardless of education or economic background. However, the youngest women—those under 40—named as the greatest detriment "lack of aggressiveness," although their older peers cited "discrimination." Perhaps this particular response demonstrates that equal employment opportunity programs are viewed as effective by those at or near the beginning of their careers.

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Last year's participants supported all but one of seven major women's issues. Today's women officers reject not only maternity leave benefits comparable to disability benefits, but government child day care centers as well.

However, two-thirds of the women support a majority of the issues. The feminist stance of the respondents is higher among those under 40, degreed, in the best paying jobs, formerly married but without a husband in the home, and from an upper middle class or wealthy background.

Only one participant indicated she was unsure about the concept of equal pay for equal work; indeed, she may be the same officer who voted against equal pay last year. As was true in 1977, the second most popular issue is the right of workers to resume the same or equivalent work after maternity leave.

The vote on women's issues is shown at right.

	Equal Rights Amendment	Equal Pay for Equal Work	
Approve	65%	99.6%	
Disapprove	16	—	
Not sure	19	.4	
	100%	100.0%	
	Maternity Leave Benefits Comparable to Disability Benefit	**Right to Resume Same or Equivalent Work After Maternity Leave**	**Tax Deduction for Child Care Expenses for Working Parents**
Approve	40%	85%	64%
Disapprove	41	6	23
Not sure	19	9	13
	100%	100%	100%
	Government Child Day Care Centers	**Abortion on Demand**	
Approve	36%	61%	
Disapprove	47	27	
Not sure	25	12	
	100%	100%	

CONCLUSION

While the number of women officers in leading business organizations remains small, the total has grown impressively in just one year. However, the majority of the survey participants remain long-service employees who have been promoted from the clerical ranks into officer roles which may approximate their former duties. The proportion of women officers whose education, career history, and compensation level bears similarity to senior level males in the work place is still very, very small.

Over the years to come, more and more women now in professional schools will enter corporate training programs. As they advance, the level of participation of women in the hierarchy of business will rise dramatically. Role models will encourage greater numbers of women to seek upward mobility for themselves.

Undoubtedly, the profile of a woman officer in most respects ultimately will be more like that of her peer, the male officer, than that of others of either sex outside the top ranks of business.

PROFILE OF A WOMAN OFFICER

TITLE

Chairman, Vice Chairman, President	1.2%
Group VP, Senior VP, and Vice President	22.6
Assistant Vice President	7.5
Secretary	12.0
Assistant Secretary	43.5
Assistant Treasurer	7.2
Other	6.0
	100.0%

TYPE OF EMPLOYER

Industrial	57.9%
Non-Industrial	42.1
	100.0%

BASE

East	38.0%
Midwest	30.5
South and Southwest	15.0
West	16.5
	100.0%

INSIDE DIRECTOR

Yes	2.6%
No	97.4
	100.0%

OUTSIDE DIRECTORSHIPS

None	92.0%
One	7.2
Two or more	.8
	100.0%

AGE

Under 40	28.4%
40-49	27.5
50 or over	44.1
	100.0%

CASH COMPENSATION (SALARY AND BONUS)

Less than $20,000	20.4%
$20,000-$29,999	30.6
$30,000-$39,999	18.7
$40,000-$49,999	12.3
$50,000-$59,999	6.4
$60,000-$69,999	5.1
$70,000 or more	6.5
	100.0%

PERQUISITES

Medical Examination	47.5%
Stock Options	44.5
Extraordinary Insurance Coverage	42.8
Stock Purchase Plan	32.2
Automobile	16.5
Club Membership	13.6
Financial Counseling	12.3
Low-cost Loans	11.9
Deferred Compensation	11.0
Performance Shares	8.1
Vacation Retreat	4.2
Management Contract	2.1
None	14.0

(Results do not add to 100% due to multiple responses.)

NUMBER OF EMPLOYERS

1	17.1%
2	22.2
3	19.2
4	17.1
5 or more	24.4
	100.0%

YEARS WITH PRESENT EMPLOYER

0- 5	19.6%
6-10	21.7
11-15	10.2
16-20	13.2
21-25	14.0
26 or more	21.3
	100.0%